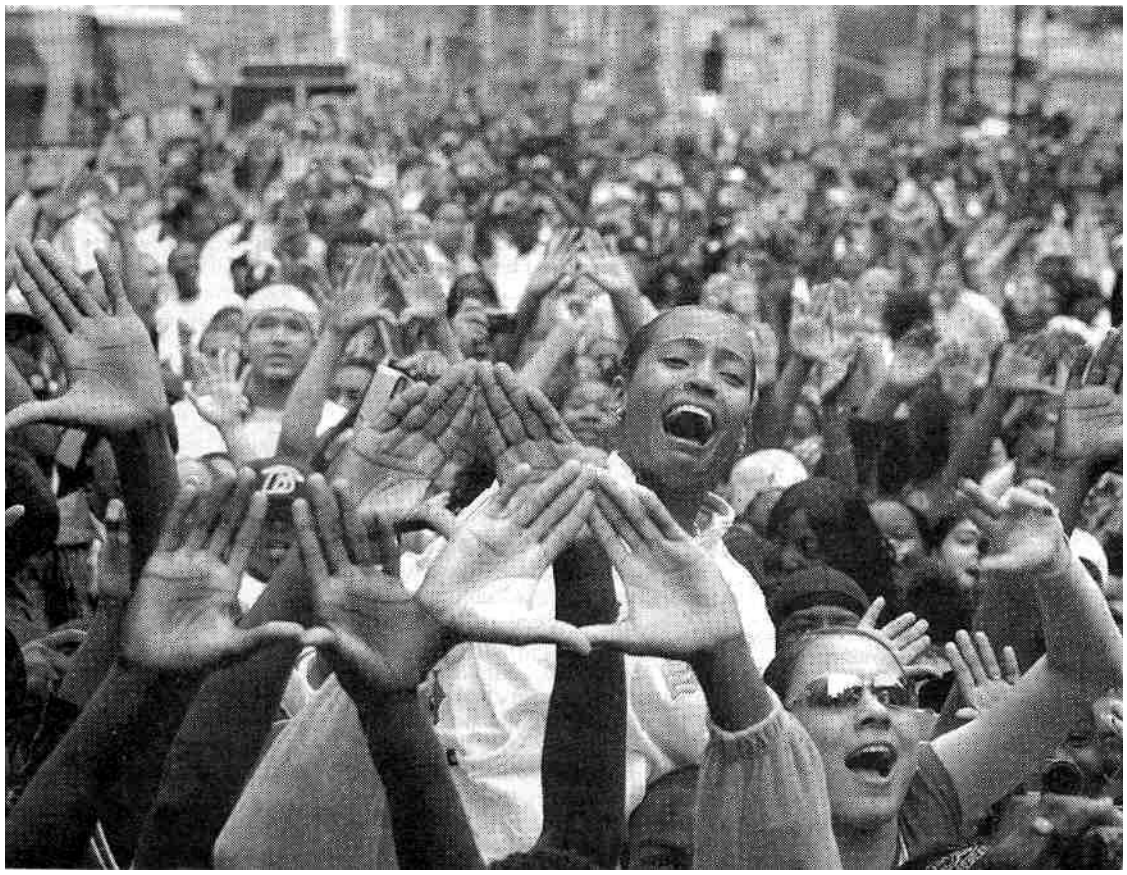
CAPITALISM AND EDUCATION

A COMMUNIST VIEW

- ***What are the real goals of the public schools?***
- ***What's behind the testing issue?***
- ***Why parents, teachers, students must unite***
- ***How we can fight back for our kids, our class***



PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY PAMPHLET
SUGGESTED DONATION: $1

WHY WE WROTE THIS PAMPHLET

As educators we are involved in constant struggles and debate. Nationwide standards? Testing? Tracking? Inclusion of special education students? Magnet schools? Vouchers and charter schools? These debates are carried out against a backdrop of continued crisis and uncertainty. Domestically, we see incredible corruption in the Enron and World.com collapses. We've witnessed the terrifying attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. War continues in Afghanistan and the Middle East, with repeated bombings of Iraq, and the probability of a land war over Iraq's oil. The recession is real for many of us, with rising unemployment and continuing attacks on our working conditions. This crisis of the US ruling class has brought about a new rise of fascism. The ruling class must increase its efforts to discipline its own forces by consolidation and by war against their imperialist rivals. The ruling class needs a stronger control over the working class as well in order to contain rebellion and produce a loyal army.

Although we think of the bosses controlling the workers with National Guard units and fire hoses, they have been using the education system to control us for a long time. Public education developed in the mid-1800s in particular to socialize workers. In 1983, during Reagan's presidency, members of major corporations, led by Louis Gershon of IBM, and representatives of the Administration, met to discuss the problems that business was seeing with education. Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, all agreed that the US was not competitive because our students weren't learning. Out of this meeting, and others that followed, came demands for national standards. But, the debates over education, and how to reform it, have continued to this day. We see this most clearly in the debates over whole language versus phonics, process versus outcome, testing versus alternative assessments, and the movement "back to basics." These debates show us the ruling class arguing over the best way to keep workers in their place.

We want to understand how the bosses structure their education system, and why, and how we can fight back to make a better world for ourselves. This pamphlet attempts to answer some of these questions. The articles analyze the capitalist educational system and also describe parents, teachers and students united in recent struggles within that system. We call on all the educators at this conference to consider their jobs in the context of the whole unjust capitalist system and to choose sides—the side of the working class. Only the workers can solve problems of today's schools, and they can do this only by tearing down the old system and building a new one, communism.

WHY THERE ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS 1

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WHAT WE FIGHT FOR: *PLP fights directly for communism. The Soviet Union and China returned to capitalism long ago. The two-stage idea of first socialism, then communism, led back to capitalism.*

As the world's bosses prepare for all wars and eventually World War III, PLP organizes workers, students and soldiers to turn these wars into a revolution for communism. This fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat requires a mass Red Army led by the communist PLP.

Communism means working together to build a society based on need. We will abolish work for wages, money and profit. Everyone will share society's benefits and burdens.

Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of race. Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women workers.

Communism means abolishing nations. One working class, one world, one party.

Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers, eventually everyone, must become communist organizers..

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Why There Are Public Schools

Why do we have public schools? We have been taught, probably in those self-same schools, that we have free public schools to educate Americans so that they can exercise their rights as citizens, to provide equality of opportunity, and because people have to compete so that they can make a living. But what we hope to show you is that these are not the only, or even the main reasons why widespread public education exists in the U.S. In fact, mass public education was created by the ruling classes of the US because of these needs to maintain their profits and power, and has evolved to meet the needs of the ruling class far more than the needs of the working class.

If you look at a timeline of the history of public education you will see that there was very little of public education, or education of any kind, early in colonial history. This was not unique in that period, and, in fact, there are still relatively few countries in which the majority of children attend school.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted by the past.

Karl Marx, 18th Brumaire

In agricultural societies the church and family carried out most, if not, all training and education. In early America and elsewhere, kindergarten consisted of so-called "dame" schools—children educated in homes by women. This was often the only education for girls. Town schools were the equivalent of elementary schools. In New England, education was seen as important to teach religion, and obedience to the laws of the colony. While Massachusetts passed laws as early as 1642 and 1647 requiring some schooling in townships of at least 50 households the history of education shows little organized education through the 17th and 18th centuries. The first high school to be founded, Boston Latin School, while public, was founded to educate the children of the Puritan leaders, who were then destined to attend Harvard College, which was founded in 1636. Otherwise, education continued to be the province of the family. While the government encouraged more education, it wasn't required, and it certainly wasn't public and mass.

WHY DID PUBLIC EDUCATION START?

While production took place in the family, then education took place in the family. Very few children actually attended school. By 1840 just under 38% of white children aged 5-19 attended schools. In 1860 the number was 59%. There were distinct regional differences in the development of education in the colonies, and then the states. The English had the greatest influence on American education, and we see the earliest development of organized public education in New England—and those percentages reflect educational trends mostly in the North, especially Massachusetts, which led in the development of mass, public education.

There was very little public education in the South—it was illegal to teach slaves to read, and the rich educated their own children. It wasn't until the end of slavery that the Southern states had public schools. In fact, statewide public schools in the South only developed during the Reconstruction era, under the sponsorship of the Freedmen's Bureau, whose mission was to educate the hundreds of thousands of former slaves.

WHY PUBLIC EDUCATION EXPANDED

The tremendous growth of public education parallels the economic and political changes that came with urbanization and industrialization

"Mr. Osborne, may I be excused? My brain is full."

Gary Larson's famous cartoon pokes fun at teaching methods—but rulers' needs determine what our students' brains are full of

What caused these changes? After the Revolutionary War commerce increased tremendously, with the end of British restrictions on trade. This began to alter the relationship between the family and the system of production. From 1792 to 1807 the value of foreign trade increased fourfold. The accumulation of capital led to a search for investments. At the same time, technological advances in production—what we call the Industrial Revolution—made it possible to manufacture many products, especially cloth, more cheaply and quickly in factories than on hand looms located in homes. So, in addition to increased investment in commerce and trade, capital was invested in production. Competition from increased factory production forced farmers and artisans out of business, and capital was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the landlords and capitalists. Farm families that had produced a living with the labor of all family members now might need to send some to work in the new factories.

From 1795 to the Civil War in 1860 there was tremendous growth in the number of workers and a huge drop in the numbers of independent merchants and proprietors. The number of people involved in agriculture dropped, while the number of people involved in manufacturing and distribution increased. The family ceased to be the dominant unit of production. Workers were clustered in industrial towns. Additionally, the 1840s and 1850s brought a tremendous influx of immigrants—millions from Ireland alone, due to the potato famine. These immigrants were approximately one-eighth of the entire US population. Coming with little money, they became part of the urban proletariat, and if they were not so lucky, part of the "reserve army of labor"—the unemployed.

READING, WRITING—OR REBELLION

Industrialization caused new stresses. Workers organized and demanded not just land, not just the vote, but also education, in the hope that their children wouldn't have to struggle so.

However, it wasn't the workers demands that caused the development of public education. Instead, it was the fears of the capitalists that drove the states to establish schools. The ruling class was haunted by memories of uprisings of poor and disgruntled citizens. The Shays Rebellion in Massachusetts, the Whiskey Rebellion in Western Pennsylvania, the Dorr War in Rhode Island, and many other fights for free land, often led by Revolutionary War veterans really frightened ruling class. We can see this fear if we look at the opposing trends in both the North and the South. Industrialization first began in Rhode Island, and in Lowell and Lawrence, Massachusetts. The beginning of general public education was in Lowell. And, as we've seen, in the South, where chattel slavery was the dominant economic system, there was little public schooling. From 1840-1860 attendance in school was positively correlated with the number of workers involved in manufacturing, and negatively correlated to the importance of slavery in the economy.

Industrialization brought many problems, including alienation of labor. Here Karl Marx explains:

> What, then constitutes the alienation of labor? First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, *i.e.* it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content, but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels himself outside himself….If is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it….External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification.

—Karl Marx, The Educational and Philosophical Manuscripts

The schools were founded to control the dangerous consequences of alienation that Marx writes about which were problems for the ruling class. Many of us have heard the story that propelled Horace Mann, "the father of public education," to take on the leadership of the developing Massachusetts school system. Mann had been approached in 1837 by a Massachusetts capitalist, Edmund Dwight. Dwight was one of many who felt that in order to control the workers schools must be founded. Mann was reluctant to take on the post as head of The State Board of Education. But Mann had heard of the destruction of Broad Street in Boston after a riot caused by the collision of a Yankee fire engine and an Irish funeral. Mann saw in that destruction the future destruction of capitalism by unhappy workers if they weren't socialized, and especially in the case of foreign born workers, assimilated.

Let the capitalists say it themselves:

> …Let then the influence of our Common Schools become universal, for they are the main pillars of the permanency of our free institutions; a protection from our enemies abroad, and our surest safety against internal commotions.
>
> *—Lowell Mass. School Committee Report, 1846*

> From my observations and experience, I am perfectly satisfied that the owners of manufacturing property have a deep pecuniary interest in the education and morals of their help; and I believe that the time is not distant when the truth of this will appear more and more clear. And as competition becomes more close, and small circumstances of more importance in turning the scale in favor of one establishment over another, I believe it will be seen that the establishment, other things being equal, which has the best educated and most moral help will give the greatest production at the least cost per pound.
>
> *—Homer Bartlett, agent of the Massachusetts Cotton Mills, 1841*

> In Lowell, and in many other places, the proprietor find the training of the schools admirably adapted to prepare the children for the labor of the mills.
>
> The owners of factories are more concerned than other classes and interests in the intelligence of their laborers. When the latter are well-educated and the former are disposed to deal justly, controversies and strikes can never occur, nor can the minds of the mass be prejudiced by demagogues and controlled by temporary and factious considerations.
>
> *—George Boutwell, 1859, Secretary of Massachusetts Board of Education,*

THEIR GOALS AND OUR GOALS

Right from the horses' mouths! Capitalism needs public education to teach workers discipline. To teach workers obedience, patriotism, passivity. But, even while it struggled to control the working class, public education has never been a system of equality. The earliest proposals for education, such as Thomas Jefferson's in 1779, called for a two-track system for the "laboring and the learned"…which would allow a very few of the laboring classes to advance by "raking a few geniuses from the rubbish." Education for the working class has a history of racism; many members of the working class, such as Native Americans at points weren't even included. We still see the inequities today in working class schools, especially in so-called minority schools, and well documented by investigators such as Jonathan Kozol.

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education, sponsored by the Federal Department of Education, issued a report "A Nation at Risk" deploring the state of education in this country because "Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world." How will the US continue as the capitalist superpower that it is if its working class is so poorly trained? In fact, as the TIMSS has shown, it isn't just the working class that isn't trained well, but we're only looking at the use of education as an instrument of class rule.

That this trend has only continued and intensified can be seen in many of today's "new" initiatives in education: a movement for national standards in a field previously left to the states, national testing mandates, and federal funding targeted to such goals.

As teachers, students, parents, and other workers, we need to understand these issues clearly. We need to look closely at the goals or hidden agendas of school "reforms" and initiatives that fly at us day after day, always remembering that the main goal of the schools is to serve the class in power, and that

the real needs of our students will never be the main goal of the schools until our class, the working class, is able to take power and build a new society.

Testing: A Communist Perspective

In schools around the country parents, students and teachers are united in their desire to find ways for working-class children to get the best possible education, to learn the skills they need to survive in the world and to gain the knowledge they need to be fulfilled human beings. This has always been true among the working class, which has fought hard battles to improve the education its children receive, from the earliest days of capitalism when peasants during the French revolution demanded free schools through the Civil Rights movement in the US when a multi-racial movement struggled to end racist school segregation in the South. Workers are engaged in all of these same struggles today, still trying to create new schools to serve the poorest youth and to end the racism that pervades the system. But, like the mythological Hydra which kept sprouting new heads, the capitalist education system has produced a new battle in which teachers, students and parents have become embroiled.

None of us want children to slip through...without learning, nor tested with measures designed for their failure.

This battle is the national debate around issues of standards and high-stakes testing. This far from a simple issue, and workers are ranged on both sides of the question. Many parents and teachers see the need for higher standards and more rigorous testing of students. They see the need to hold schools accountable for the learning of their children. On the other hand, parents and teachers are fighting against high-stakes tests which they believe to be unfair to students in many ways. The tests are seen as an attack on students who are not provided with adequate preparation for the tests. For workers, both ideas have validity. None of us want children to slip through the school system without learning, nor do we want them tested with measures designed for their failure.

DIFFERENCES AMONG THE RULERS

However, the ruling class also has interests on both sides of the question of testing, and we must understand their plan for our children in order to enter this battlefield fully armed. The main forces of the ruling class, at this moment led by George Bush, have thrown their support behind more testing and high standards, which are now being enforced in all states by a national law. A smaller, liberal faction in the ruling class would prefer less testing and support education reforms which tend to emphasize the learning process rather than the outcome. Neither side of the ruling class can or will provide the education we, the workers, want for our young people. Both sides plan to use the schools to reproduce the inequalities of capitalism for the new generations.

Currently, the ruling class seems to be united around a new law which represents their plan for the schools in this period of increasing war abroad and oppression at home. The new education bill, which the ruling class has wholeheartedly embraced, has one main tool which it proposes to ensure all the nation's children learn: testing, testing, testing. Almost every state has recently or is currently developing new educational standards and tests. On even a surface level one can see a variety of problems with many of the tests used by the education system to set its "higher standards to ensure student learning."

WHAT DO THE TESTS TEST?

One issue is that the tests are not always, or even usually, predictive of actual, meaningful student outcomes. For example, the PSAT given to college-bound juniors is often used to determine scholarship awards, even though studies have shown that while boys do better on the math section of the test than girls, they are likely to have lower grades in college courses. In New York, the recently revised English Language Arts Regents Exam is required for graduation for all students, including those just beginning to learn English as a foreign language. The test asks students to write four essays over two three-hour test periods which include several readings and note-taking from a listening passage as well as the writing. Most students cannot do either pre-writing or revising in this time-frame. The test measures students' ability to write under pressure, but many stu-

dents who might be competent or excellent writers under other circumstances do badly on the test. There are countless other examples, since most multiple choice tests, common because they are cheapest to produce and score, evaluate skill at answering multiple choice questions as much as they test any actual knowledge.

Teachers and students must recognize that ruling class schools serve ruling class goals, and fight back

Even the makers of the tests talk about the flaws in their tests. Statistically, no test is perfect. Just like a scientific experiment or a political poll, tests have a margin of error, which means that individual scores are not some precise measure of absolute achievement. Individual scores are not precise measures, but tell us a general range within which a student's achievement falls, even though requirements for passing or failing are usually based on a single score. Students may fail tests because their scores lie a few points below the passing score but within the standard error of measurement, not because they are truly deficient in their understanding of the material. In tests which are norm-referenced against a sample population, questions are thrown out if too many students get them right in order to maintain a bell curve. This means that some schools or students will always be below the 50th percentile. Despite screenings, test items slip through which have no correct answers, or which have incorrect answers on scoring sheet. Essay tests are graded by the subjective judgment of the scorer.

These problems are recognized by many who are on the inside of the education field, not only teachers and parents but also administrators and even the designers of the tests. On a recent "Frontline" PBS special, several test-makers and school administrators went on the record to describe the problems with many tests and the misapplications of those tests caused by the recent push for standards.

If the makers of these tests go on public television and say that the tests are flawed, why do the rulers insist on continuing to use them? Because their actual goal is far deeper than the stated one of ensuring that all children learn. The ruling class has a system to run and state power to hang onto and high-stakes testing is a weapon in that life-and-death struggle. The tests help achieve the two main goals of capitalist education: to maintain a skill gap between workers and to control the ideology of the masses.

TWO TRACKS MEET BOSSES' NEEDS

The capitalist system cannot survive with only completely ignorant workers. It must have some workers who can read and do math and perform other skills. But the same system needs the rest of the mass of workers to be less educated so that they cannot demand the higher paid jobs given to the educated and so that they will be less likely to analyze their exploitation and rebel. This mass of unemployed and underpaid are also used as a threat against the better paid workers: "Look what could have happened to you. Aren't you lucky." High standards and testing serve as a means to control this. Funding to different schools and districts is now being determined by scores on tests. Schools that have high test scores get more money. Schools with low test scores are stuck with high class size and worse conditions. And remember that flaw about the bell curve: some schools will always be below the 50th percentile. But in some states, schools with low scores are being given monetary support to improve scores, so this can't be the only use of testing for the ruling class.

TESTING AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL

The ideological control which the ruling class can exert through the use of testing is dramatic. First of all, tests are an excellent tool in the blame game. When students do poorly it must be someone's fault: Maybe the teachers are incompetent and should take a harder licensing exam. Maybe the parents provide a "culture of poverty" by not reading to their kids. Maybe the kids have ADD or are genetically violence-prone or just lazy. Of course, the President won't blame a capitalist system that must keep some workers unemployed. Many students learn early that those who pass tests are "good" students who will be

rewarded with success and those who don't should blame themselves. Many teachers are convinced that their problem students must have bad parents. All of this effectively prevents working-class unity and a clear vision of capitalism.

Then there is ideological control exerted by specific tests rather than testing in general. In the current climate, tests control everything that teachers teach from math to literature. The social studies tests, however, are particularly telling. Social studies curricula demand a capitalist worldview be provided to students, complete with individualism, nationalism, and anti-communism. A few examples may illustrate what students are expected to learn. In Virginia, test writers from Harcourt Brace were told that no test question would be allowed that mentioned Nat Turner's slave rebellion. In California, testing standards mention the Japanese-Americans who joined the US army during World War II, but not those who fought back against internment. Across the board we find that it was the Russian winter which defeated Hitler rather than the Red Army. Because the tests are now of utmost importance to the school systems, curricula that teachers are asked to teach are becoming more and more restrictive, with detailed pacing calendars or even pre-written lessons that keep each teacher in the same place on the same day. Even without specific dictates, most teachers feel constrained by the need to have students pass the tests, not teaching material that will not be tested or contradicts the curriculum because they are afraid to confuse students (or because they do not know better, having also been educated in the capitalist system).

Liberal capitalists have the same goals as any other capitalists. . .They just use different weapons to maintain a divide between educated and ignorant workers.

JUST FIGHTING TESTING IS NOT THE ANSWER

It might seem that the obvious answer to the dilemma of testing is to fight against the tests, even to keep our students from taking them. But consider the liberal anti-testing movement. This movement also comes from a wing of the ruling class. The anti-testing movement correctly claims that the tests are often racially and culturally biased. However, their line basically asserts that some students, specifically black and Latin students, cannot learn in a "traditional" manner expected of other students. The anti-testing movement pushes for students to be evaluated through portfolios which show that a student can use "multiple intelligences" to "make meaning" from texts. It insists that "process is more important than product." This sometimes means that a student may get through school by drawing a little picture of three bundles of four sticks each every time he has to multiply 3 x 4 and never learn his multiplication tables. Students who are perceived as learning better by non-linguistic methods can make it through this kind of program doing alternative projects instead of doing enough writing practice to become proficient writers. Well, a student who knows that 3x4 is 12 and can write a good essay will certainly be getting a better job, and the gap between skilled workers and the uneducated will be perpetuated just as surely as under a testing system. Liberal capitalists have the same goals as any other capitalists, and they need weapons to get there. They just use different weapons to maintain a divide between educated and ignorant workers.

The New York Times Magazine describes suburban communities fighting against standardized testing as striving to maintain community control. And certainly many states, counties and boards of education would like to control their own educational agendas. But as we enter into this current period of fascism, the ruling class has a need to consolidate its control over all aspects of society in order to prop up a crumbling economy and preserve its position as an imperialist power. We see this in the mergers of major oil companies, the disciplining of companies like Microsoft, the combining of military and police forces which began before September 11 and intensified after it. The US ruling class has entered into a long term struggle abroad, which they call the "war on terrorism," for which they will be needing a working class which is prepared to fight for US control of oil or which is at least passive in the face of the ruling class's plans. In order to control the working class to that extents, they need to control the schools, the training which young workers are receiving as the crisis develops. The dominant wing of the ruling class has agreed that, as far as education is concerned, testing is the weapon they will be using for the moment. None of the liberal anti-testing forces have been allowed to succeed, and it doesn't seem likely that they will anytime soon. In New York for instance, alternative schools have lost the waiver that used to exempt them from Regents exams, and must now get with the nation-wide program of testing students.

An analysis of the ruling class needs which drive the education movements which we workers are now involved in may at first seem disheartening, as if we will be fighting a losing battle no matter which side we choose. But the main lesson we should learn is to see the education in its context, as part of the whole system of capitalism. It is true that just fighting for or against testing will not solve the problem of educating all the children of the working class. The ruling class is not prepared to educate these students the way the working class needs and wants them to be educated and so their reform movements are never actually designed to solve this problem. Capitalism also cannot provide jobs or justice for its workers, because it is intrinsically motivated by the rulers' need for profit. The only answer for those of us who are fighting for education, or for jobs or justice, is to see that the entire system is set up for the rulers not the workers, and to see that the system must be destroyed for us to finally win a world we want our children to grow up in.

In Progressive Labor Party, we are fighting for that new world while we join in the battles to make education serve the students. Revolutionary communists have just as much of a stake in the education of the working class as the capitalists do in its miseducation. We also have high standards. In order to fight a revolution, take state power and build a new world, we will all need the skills that the capitalist education system doles out to some, but not all, of its students. We will also need the ideas that the capitalist system does not want anyone to have. Every day in our classrooms, teachers are fighting to give our students the skills and ideas that they need, whether those skills and ideas are on the bosses' curriculum or not. We need them to know who really defeated the Nazis and also to understand why their textbook hides the truth. We also want all of our students to be able to do well on the bosses' tests, to master the skills the bosses want only a few to have at the same time understanding the purposes of those tests. We will not let the bosses keep our students ignorant with their racist and anti-working-class tests. We fight against all the wedges the rulers try to drive between different groups of workers, this educational gap just as much as the divisions caused by racism and sexism.

Teaching unquestioning loyalty to ruling-class "patriotism" is one of the tasks of the public schools

ARE YOU A REAL AMERICAN?
TAKE THIS QUIZ AND FIND OUT!
SOME AMERICANS ARE MORE AMERICAN THAN OTHERS, YOU KNOW!
DO YOU GENUINELY BELIEVE THE TERRORISTS ARE MOTIVATED BY NOTHING MORE COMPLEX THAN A BLIND, UNREASONING HATRED OF FREEDOM?
YES ☐ ← CHOOSE ONE → ☐ NO
DO YOU AGREE THAT THE PRESIDENT SHOULD HAVE THE UNCHECKED AUTHORITY TO DO WHATEVER HE WANTS--UNTIL HE DECIDES THE WAR ON TERROR IS OVER?
YES ☐ ← CHOOSE ONE → ☐ NO
ARE YOU BLISSFULLY UNTROUBLED BY SECRET SEARCHES, INDEFINITE DETENTIONS, AND MILITARY TRIBUNALS--AS LONG AS THEY HAPPEN TO SOMEONE ELSE?
YES ☐ ← CHOOSE ONE → ☐ NO
AND FINALLY--DO YOU DRAW STRENGTH FROM YOUR UNWAVERING FAITH IN AN INVISIBLE, OMNISCIENT DIETY WHO FAVORS THOSE BORN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN LAND MASS ABOVE ALL OTHERS?
YES ☐ ← CHOOSE ONE → ☐ NO
IF YOU ANSWERED "NO" TO ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS, IT'S INDISPUTABLE:
YOU ARE NOT A REAL AMERICAN!
WHY DON'T YOU JUST GO BACK TO YOUR CAVE IN AFGHANISTAN?
BUT--I LIVE IN KANSAS!
SORRY! BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME!

AROUND THE WORLD, TRUE EDUCATION COMES FROM STRUGGLE

Teachers, students and parents around the world struggle against the forces of capitalist mis-education and oppression in schools of all levels. Even this small sample of articles, selected from the past year of our newspaper, *Challenge-Desafio,* can show us the possibilities which emerge and grow when the working class unites around issues of education.

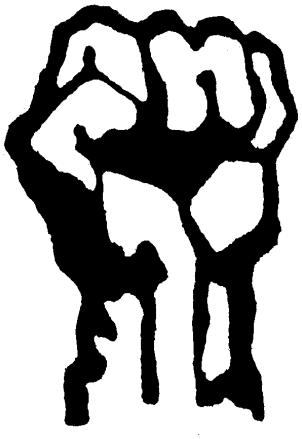
Chicago Teachers Open To Anti-War, Anti-Racist Ideas

(Feb. 27, 2002) CHICAGO—Members of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) House of Delegates passed a resolution calling on the union to "encourage all its members to engage in educational activities…involving union members, students, and parents…on topics such as racial profiling and racist attacks, the war in Afghanistan, the potential for war around the world, options for peaceful solutions, and the changes in attitude toward civil liberties. The CTU Quest Center will gather resources, lesson ideas, names of potential speakers and other relevant materials."

A communist teacher spoke in favor of the motion. She said, "we should not be so quick to jump unthinkingly on the patriotic bandwagon. It is very likely the U.S. will become involved in a war not only in Afghanistan but in Iraq or Iran as well. I for one, do not want to see my students sent off to fight and die for the oil companies." Several people applauded.

Many union members were involved in organizing for the resolution. It originated from a discussion among activist teachers at a September anti-war rally. It was debated at a meeting of the union caucus PACT, as well as at the union's Education Committee, which added the paragraph about the Quest Center. It was also discussed, and changed, at the union's Executive Board meeting and then brought up again in the House of Delegates. Three of the originators of the motion spoke for it and a fourth woman moved to amend it to include gender apartheid and discrimination in Afghanistan.

Students and Teachers Support Communist Teachers in Fight Against Harassment



(April 2, 2002) BROOKLYN, NY—At Erasmus High School, teachers are once again under attack for bringing communist politics to their students. After manipulating students and harassing parents at home, the administration has concluded that the two teachers took students on and "unauthorized, overnight trip" and placed a letter in the teachers' files threatening them with firing and loss of licenses. Of course, when teachers and students attend Sunday school, museum outings or Little League together, no administrator asks if the Superintendent gave permission.

The administration has shown all its ugliest colors. They have lied to students about why they were asking questions, about what could happen to the teachers, and about the teachers' response to the letter. They have asked the questioned students not to tell the teachers about the investigation. They presented the teachers with only a very general accusation and then assumed guilt because we asked for written allegations.

But five years of PLP organizing in this school has left us in the stronger position. The student government wrote a petition in an emergency meeting as soon as they heard about the investigation.

The petition called for the principal to drop his investigations of dedicated teachers in order to give his attention to the real problems of the school: fascistic security, abusive teachers, and the lack of decent elective classes. Within a week 300 of the 800 students and many teachers had signed the petition. Many teachers have expressed support in other ways, including one who wrote an extensive letter to the principal condemning *(continued on next page)*

(from previous page) the investigation and supporting the accused teachers.

The union has filed a standard grievance against the letter in our file.

UPDATE—JULY 2002

In the last weeks of school the administration has escalated its attacks by excessing one of the teachers involved in this struggle and allowing us to find out through the grapevine. The student body was outraged and organized immediate militant protests throughout the school which were described by one assistant principal as "starting a revolution." Again, students were lied to and dismissed as ignorant trouble-makers by the administration. On graduation day, seniors made signs of support for their teacher, but were reprimanded and had their signs snatched away. When the teacher tried to enter the building for work that day, she was told by security that the principal would not let her in. Later, the principal passed the blame to the superintendent. The administration has shown how much they fear any resistance and how little they believe that their students can make intelligent choices. The students, on the other hand, have learned, in their own words , "how to fight back." They and many of their teachers now can see more clearly how the system oppresses them.

Faculty-Student-Worker Solidarity Fights War, Cuts

(June 5, 2002) OHIO—Chanting, "Strike! Strike," over 400 students, teachers and campus workers marched in the greatest show of solidarity in a generation against a large, public college administration here. One teacher called it a "critical mass, a movement whose time has come." This was the culmination of a year-long struggle, which has laid the groundwork for a possible campus-wide strike in the future.

Several teachers accused this "non-profit" institution of hoarding money in slush funds and not making educating students a priority.

The newly-formed Student Union charged the college bookstore with price-gouging. Several campus workers called for solidarity of workers (including welfare recipients), students and faculty. Campus workers suffer a "pass system," requiring them to get a permission slip to leave their work area. Another speaker said we need money for schools, rather than jails and war.

Since 9/11, four teach-ins and campus union organizing have united the mainly working-class and immigrant students, faculty and campus workers. Just two weeks after 9/11, over 800 students attended a day-long Students for Justice (SFJ) "Teach-in on the Terrorist Attacks: What the Media Won't Tell Us." While the Administration held a "healing" vigil, SFJ provided critical information on oil politics, a history of U.S. government state terrorism, the CIA's clandestine operations and past support for fascists including Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, etc. Speakers placed oil and imperialism front and center.

The successful teach-in stemmed from previous organizing, including a labor conference featuring domestic and farm workers. Twenty-five teachers invited their students, which helped establish SFJ as a credible campus voice. The campus newspaper's right-wing attacks, which included some red baiting, gave SFJ even greater credibility, sparking letters and campus wide networking spreading the SFJ's ideas.

In late November a teach-in on the Patriot Bill and the assault on dissent drew 75 people. In March, 300 attended another, better-organized teach-in. While there were "expert" speakers, students comprised more than half the panel, discussing current and past U.S. government repression.

Faculty union activism has grown, in reaction to threatened cuts in health benefits and the use of part-timers. Collective bargaining is stalled for the second consecutive year and teachers are irate. New leadership emerged after a series of union meetings, with 50 to 80 teachers attending. They organized the first successful test of the faculty/student/worker alliance; a campus-wide demonstration with 175 students and campus workers.

SFJ is a mix of pacifists, liberals, reformers, environmentalists, anarchists and Marxists. Some people are interested in a study group on capitalism and the history, strengths and weaknesses of the communist movement. Out of this, a genuine anti-imperialist, anti-racist leadership can emerge.

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CHALLENGE-DESAFIO

IN YOUR SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY.
SEE BACK COVER FOR DETAILS

15,000 Striking Teachers Battle Cops, Iran Rulers

(Feb. 13, 2002) TEHRAN, IRAN—Two days ago (January 26) police attacked thousands of teachers, mostly women, with truncheons and tear gas when they rallied to demand better wages. The teachers' march, coinciding with the visit of UN chief Annan,

Youth on the March: May Day 2002 in Brooklyn saw workers and students join with PLP and comrades around the world

was declared "illegal" by the cops. The demonstrators then marched to Tehran University, their ranks swelling to 20,000 strong. Again the Pasdaran (cops) attacked them. Clashes continued for several hours. Ninety people were arrested.

On Jan. 22, a one-day teachers' strike shut 80% of all schools here. Despite the bosses' and their media lies and attacks (even announcing "cancellation" of the march), that day 15,000 teachers, chanting "Enough promises, teachers of the country, unite," marched to the Islamic Majlis (Assembly) to present their demands for higher wages, housing subsidies, national insurance and the right to form an independent teachers' association. When some Majlis politicians addressed the teachers, the angry crowd shouted them down. Teachers knew these politicians were not their allies. (A politician's monthly salary equals a teacher's *yearly* wage.) Similar marches occurred throughout Iran.

This teachers' fight again shows that class struggle will continue under all circumstances. Many workers and youth now see that despite the mantle of religion, Iranian rulers are just another bunch of capitalist exploiters. Indeed, these teachers are teaching their students, and fellow teachers all worldwide, that the best education is to fight the bosses.

10,000 Teachers March, But Bosses' 'Democracy' Won't Cut It

(June 19, 2002) MEXICO CITY—After 16 days of continuous picket lines, dissident teachers rallied today (May 30) to protest the sellout by the leadership of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE).

Led by CNTE, a group opposing SNTE leaders, over 10,000 marched demanding increased educational budget and union democratization, while opposing changes in the pension plan. H.S. students and striking Petrochemical workers from Michoacan joined the protest in solidarity. The teachers came mainly from Oaxaca, Michoacan and Guerrero, where their union locals are negotiating for their demands. They are rejecting the 5% wage increase the union recently accepted.

During the protest a CNTE delegation met with an aide to President Fox, and decided to give Fox "the benefit of a doubt" about starting serious negotiations with them. The CNTE used the marchers' militancy to engage in this useless talk with the government. Now, the CNTE leadership is continuing the "plantón" in the Zócalo (central square) waiting for the federal government to begin serious talks. Even though the CNTE leadership says it opposes Fox, they still give him some credence. This is based on these union dissidents' deadly illusions in the capitalist "democratic" system.

During the march, teachers distributed a leaflet with pictures of Fox, former Pres. Salinas and Elba Esther Gordillo, former SNTE President. Salinas privatized many of Mexico's state-owned industries while stealing millions from the government treasury at the same time his brother was laundering drug money through Citibank. Ms. Gordillo and Salinas signed the "National Agreement to Modernize Basic Education," an attempt to privatize public education and turn it into centers serving corporations.

But the fact is education—public or private—is a failure for most working-class students. The needs of capitalism can never square with those of working-class students and teachers, particularly amid a worldwide capitalist system saturated with wars and fascism. The best lesson teachers and students can learn from this struggle is that capitalism in all its forms can never satisfy us as an exploited class.

Militant Youth Lead Protest vs. NJ School Cuts

(July 3, 2002) TRENTON, NJ—Hundreds of students, parents, teachers and other concerned people rallied today (June 13) against state public school budget cuts. One of newly-elected Governor McGreevey's first acts was to freeze school funding. Since other costs—payments for private contractors and collective bargaining increases—are rising, money for things like teaching positions and after-school programs is being cut. After over 30 years of fighting for parity with wealthy areas, urban districts are losing funds which they can't afford to replace with property tax increases.

The energy of the protesters, especially the youth, was electrifying. After a rally at the Statehouse, where many youth spoke, we marched to the Supreme Court. The liberal Education Law Center, which was supposed to represent the best interests of urban children, approved McGreevey's cuts. Then the Supreme Court rubber-stamped the whole lousy deal. But working-class youth, many black and Latino, weren't buying it, As the marchers got louder, many youth took the bullhorn and began leading chants: "They say cut back, we say fight back"; "Ain't no love, for government thugs"; and "They cut our schools and build more jails, we'll fight back `til we prevail."

One speaker pointed out how the rulers' racist cuts and other policies are forcing more youth into prison and into the military to fight and die in a bosses' war for oil. Another said that, contrary to the government's lies, the biggest terrorists of all are those inside the U.S. who use their government positions to cut back education and health care for the working class. Several other speakers said this rally was only the beginning, and that we need to organize a bigger action here in the fall.

Progressive Labor Party (PLP) members were very active in organizing the rally, representing a significant collective effort. Masses of students and some parents both responded to our leadership and took the lead themselves. One hundred and forty-five CHALLENGES were distributed, along with 350 PLP flyers about the cuts. This openness to PLP's analysis shows that the working class is not exactly convinced by the U.S. rulers' patriotic, pro-fascist campaign waged since September 11.

Parents, teachers and students will unite and fight back against budget cuts. We shouldn't rely on the bosses' legal system or their press. (The state-wide newspaper and other N.J. media completely ignored us, while giving front-page coverage to a doctors' rally protesting huge malpractice insurance increases, held the same day and place.) Whatever concessions we may get from McGreevey and the people he fronts for will only be won through sharp struggle.

Ultimately capitalism can never satisfy the aspirations of youth and others for equality and productive, meaningful lives. The bosses proclaim their belief in the growth of the individual and "opportunity for all." But in reality, their class system "tracks" many workers' children onto the unemployment line or into the hands of prison guards or military recruiters. PLP's growth and influence in the mass movement is the only alternative that can and will meet the needs of our class.

Remedial Education Cuts Attack All Workers

(March 13, 2002) The debate over the future of California's remedial education has heated up. Four years ago, conservatives pressured the State University (CSU) system to eliminate remdial education because "it lowers the status of the university and it costs too much". Chancellor Charles Reed issued Executive Order (EO) 665 requiring all incoming freshmen who fail English or Math proficiency exams to complete several within one year or be kicked out. These courses don't count towards graduation. This leaves struggling students with absolutely no room for error. Last year, 2,200 students (mostly black and Latin) were kicked out of the CSU system because they couldn't pass their remedial courses during the one-year time limit.

It is clear EO 665 is a racist attack on the working class. Even with the dedicated effort of many good teachers, black, Latino and many white stu-

dents don't receive even a basic education in high school. Now the ruling class will deny it to them in college. Currently, over 50% of incoming CSU freshman fail the Math and English proficiency exams. In urban areas, it jumps to 86%. High schools in urban areas are predominantly black and Latino. Such schools suffer from racist mismanagement, under-funding and apartheid segregation; 81% of Latino freshmen and 69% of black freshmen entering Cal State Los Angeles require reading and math remediation (http://www.asd.calstate.edu/).

Behind the U.S. bosses "democratic" façade lie plans to impose fascism to keep their world power.

These students have the potential to learn everything, contrary to what the bosses want us to believe. Urban students suffer from an apartheid educational system created by the bosses to eliminate any chance of a decent education. The bosses use racism to split the class solidarity among exploited workers. Only the bosses benefit from racism. Similarly, only the bosses gain from cutting remedial education. A poor education hurts the working class's ability to read, especially communist ideas in CHALLENGE, write articles, make speeches and discuss politics with their fellow workers. It also robs the working class of the scientific knowledge of dialectical materialism and the history of class struggle. This hurts (but obviously doesn't destroy) the working class's ability to lead such struggle.

The bosses use and exploit part-time and graduate student labor who teach remedial courses, paying them a fraction of a full-time professor's salary, denying them benefits, pensions, job security and an office to meet their students and offer extra help. This forces many part timers to teach at several campuses. Many say they're so busy just trying to earn enough money to live on, they feel they can't give their students the attention needed to overcome a racist high school education. The bosses pit part-time exploited workers against full-time exploited workers to divide and frustrate class struggle.

It's important for all workers to view the current attack on remedial education as an attack on the entire working class. Many high school and college PLP members are fighting to not only save but to improve remedial education. We have attended forums and distributed CHALLENGE, joined mass organizations and raised revolutionary ideas while struggling with students in our classrooms and in PLP study groups. We're also exposing the capitalist lies used to defend this racist, murderous profit system.

The bosses' attack on remedial education resembles their other attacks on the working class— Welfare "Reform," the fascist Patriot Act, mass layoffs, the racist round-up of Middle Eastern and Muslim workers and the racist bombing of Afghanistan. During imperialist war, under-funding urban high schools and cutting college remedial education helps the bosses build their imperialist army. They give urban students two choices: take a miserable super-exploitative job or join the army and become cannon fodder to secure the bosses' oil profits.

Students Lead Teachers, Parents To Defy NYPD

(July 3, 2002—Letter) On June 4, I attended a teachers union-organized rally at City Hall in NYC as part of the campaign for a new teachers contract. This action differed from all others because thousands of teenagers came and were the best part of it.

Some think the students participated only because a number of hip-hop and rap stars were appearing to support the union. But the students' support for the teachers was strong and touching, and it transformed the rally from another "stand-around-and-listen" one into a lesson in what we can do when we don't buy the bosses' "good behavior" line.

The NYPD had set up "cattle pens" on nearly every block of Broadway near City Hall, and forced people to walk as much as half a mile out of the way to get into one. They blocked off streets between the pens and wouldn't let anyone move from one to the next.

But when the pens became very tightly packed, the students demanded to be let through. The crowd of teachers, parents and students in my pen alternated contract chants with demands of "Let us through!" and kept moving slowly forward until the front of the pen was so crowded that it seemed about to burst.

Cops ran back and forth. Cops on horseback were called in. Soon block after block, they were forced to open the pens and let the crowd move. Many of the cops were clearly scared—they are used to pushing docile crowds around for the bosses. Eventually, we were able to move all the way to the front of the rally at City Hall.

Does this sound like disorderly conduct? Not at all! Throughout the whole process, the crowd moved together—no one was shoved aside or trampled. Teenagers helped older people over obstacles, made sure that no one, young or old, fell or was pushed into danger. It was a moment when it was clear that we were there as workers and workers-to-be, brothers and sisters—not a collection of groups, but one class.

If we can preserve that kind of spirit in all our schools and neighborhoods, we can win much more than a strike or a contract—we can win the world for our class.

—A not-too-old guy in Brooklyn

All of these diverse battles teach us one lesson. The capitalist system we live under cannot and will not provide us with the education we want for working-class students. The only solution to the problems of the education system is a new system where workers organize society around the needs of their class, not around the profit of the bosses. Only communism can solve the problem of education. It is in fighting back against the bosses that we learn this lesson and prepare for that future. Fight for communism!

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has, and it never will. If there is no struggle, there is no progress.

Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters.

— Frederick Douglass

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